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The voice of one of the first feminists. An analysis of Aemilia Lanyer's dedications in Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum

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Preface

The English renaissance was a particularly prolific period in terms of literary production. The sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries generated authors like William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Wyatt, and many others. But what about women writers? Feminist studies about renaissance women writers only started to take hold in the second half of the twentieth century, and as for Aemilia Lanyer she was brought to scholarly notice in 1973 only thanks to a historian's research on Shakespeare's sonnets which pictured her as a woman of easy virtue and did not mention her skill as a poet. However, further examinations and studies contributed to bring to the surface Lanyer's experience as an author. Her themes and style were particularly ahead of her time because her aim was to underline women's importance in the Bible in such a way as to demonstrate that women were to be put at the center of Christianity. Besides her feminist work, Aemilia Lanyer was also in all likelihood the first poet to write a country-house poem: 'The Description of Cooke-ham.' Thus, her way of writing poetry was revolutionary in terms of genres because she also wrote patronage poems that praised women patrons by subverting the traditional Petrarchan way to refer to women in poems. But while her feminism may seem to be self-evident and apparently establishing a sense of female community, her way of defending women could appear controversial due to her choice of words and examples. Nevertheless, the feminist motive seems to eventually be both the real intention and aim with which Lanyer wrote *Salve Deus*.

1 – Aemilia Lanyer and Women in Early Modern England

1.1 The status of women in early modern England

'There is no mark on the wall to measure the precise height of women':[1] these are the words that Virginia Woolf uses to define women writers' condition in history in her essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), reflecting on why there is a scarceness of women's work in the literary field. Her essay, based on the two lectures she was invited to give in 1928 at Newnham and Girton (two women's colleges at Cambridge University) reviews women's literary history wanting to claim the possibility to be admitted into a deeply masculinist culture. The author analyzes women's discrimination through the ideal character of Judith, a hypothetical sister of Shakespeare's, who desires to become a writer like her brother, but is instead mocked and singled out as insane. Judith's story ends with a forced pregnancy and finally suicide, underscoring the basic requirement for women to make themselves visible within society: having 'a room of one's own'. A room of one's own is therefore a metaphor for independence, understood both on an economic level – as being able to earn a living doing a craft granted to few people such as that of the writer – and on the level of space, a metaphor for a place where women could feel free and creative. However, a room of one's own was hardly accessible for early women writers.

Woolf's fiction of Elizabethan women writers' absence from the literary record is fertile and enduring, yet not entirely true.[2] There is certainly a history of forgetting about

[1] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London, 2004; 1928), p. 133.

[2] Danielle Clarke, Sarah C. E. Ross, Elizabeth Scott-Bauman, 'What is Early Modern Women's Writing?', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Women's Writing in English, 1540-1700* ed. by Danielle Clarke, and Sarah C. E. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 4.

the rich and diverse reception histories of early modern women writers.[3] However, there is also a significant celebration of early modern women writers. The idea of early modern women's writing as a 'field' has gained and is continuing to gain heft with key recent publications which speak to, and engage critically with, the idea of early modern women's writing as a distinct body of material. This 'fieldness' of early modern women's writing, as Woolf widely argues with her 'ironic, sharp, and blunt narrative of the superiority of the female mind in her essay, is something to celebrate as it gestures towards some degree of parity with longer established areas of study'. In the 1980s and 1990s, during the so-called third-wave feminism, the absence of women from conventional early modern literary histories provoked the energies of an extensive feminist textual recovery expanding categories of text, authorship, and publications themselves in early modern women's writing.[4] Consequently, while Virginia Woolf wondered why 'no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet'[5], later in 1976 Joan Kelly-Gadol asked: 'did women have a renaissance?'[6]. In her essay, Kelly explores women's roles in Renaissance society writing that women's historical experience was different to that of men's, and that while men's options may have expanded during the Renaissance period, the opposite was true for women. Therefore, the author responded to her own provocative question with a straightforward 'no'. However, Margaret Ferguson provided a different answer: 'If

[3] Paul Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 34-35.
[4] Clarke, Ross, and Scott-Bauman, 'What is Early Modern Women's Writing?', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Women's Writing*, p. 5.
[5] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 65.
[6] Joan Kelly, 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?', in *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), p. 19.

women did not have a renaissance, they certainly had a Reformation'[7]. Approaches to women writers have expanded and diversified considerably in the last four decades, thanks in part to these arguments. This pluralization persists, yet tensions continue to lie at the center of the designation 'early modern women's writing'.

The status and representation of women for most of the Western history has been oppressive and restrictive. From the Renaissance to the Age of Enlightenment, women were consistently portrayed to be inferior to men and their role in society continued to be primarily domestic. One of the most deeply rooted stereotypes in patriarchal discourse is the intellectual inferiority of women and their inability to produce rational thought. Such a stereotype was often masked by the poetic and much romantic ideal of women as extremely sensitive and sentimental beings. Renaissance male authors like Wyatt, Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare used to idealize women in their works, presenting them as passive, immobile, modest, chaste and virginal, heavenly and divine characters. But in society women lived completely subservient to the patriarchal authority. The latter was represented first by their fathers and brothers, and later, by the economic-sexual exchange of marriage, through which women remained subservient for the rest of their days to the will of their husbands, relegated to the private sphere without ever having any principle of self-determination over their own lives and bodies. Even aristocratic women, the only ones who arguably might have had a fragment of more freedom from the constraints of patriarchal society, were educated to the precepts of chastity, submission, virginity, and obedience – as documented by the *Instruction of a Christian Woman* (1523), by Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives, written for the education of Mary, daughter

[7] Margaret W. Ferguson, 'Moderation and Its Discontents: Recent Work on Renaissance Women', *Feminist Studies*, 20 (1994), p. 352.

of Queen Catherine of Aragon.[8] However, the representation of and attitude toward women started to gradually improve, particularly through the medium of literature. During the Renaissance an increasing number of women learned to read and write their native language, although female literacy continued to be rare. Some women then found within literature a medium to express themselves and their feelings, and even though at their time their writings were not considered as valuable as those of their male counterparts, renaissance women writers have been getting more and more recognition in the literary field thanks to the studies that have been conducted in the last few decades. Studies have been giving attention to several female writers such as Mary Sidney (1561-1621), Mary Wroth (1587-1652), Elizabeth Cary (1585-1639), and Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645).[9]

1.2 Lanyer's life

Aemilia Lanyer's true name is Emilia Bassano and she was apparently baptized on January 27, 1569, in St. Botolph parish church, Bishopsgate, right outside the city walls of London, England.[10] Very little is known about Aemilia's mother: she was apparently a woman called Margaret Johnson who may have never been formally married to Aemilia's father Baptista Bassano. However, she was his heir and their children were treated as legitimate.[11] Aemilia's father, Baptista Bassano, was the youngest of six sons of an Italian family from the town Bassano del Grappa, a dependency of Venice, in the

[8] Juan L. Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, ed. and translated by Charles Fantazzi (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000) p. 64.
[9] Clarke, Ross, and Scott-Bauman, 'What is Early Modern Women's Writing?', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Women's Writing*, p. 4.
[10] Susanne Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 3.
[11] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 4.

Veneto region.[12] By 1540 all Bassano brothers but one were established in England and granted formal places as musicians at the court of Henry VIII, who also granted them the right to live in apartments in Charterhouse, a former Carthusian monastery. Later, during the reign of Edward VI, they were forced out by Sir Edward North, who had purchased Charterhouse, and Baptista became a resident of the parish of St. Botolph's Bishopsgate, where his daughter Aemilia would be born.[13]

Her upbringing had its privileges since court musicians were members of the minor gentry and had respectable incomes – privileges that she continued to maintain in her adult life. In her poems Aemilia claims that she was educated in Susan Bertie's dowager countess of Kent household. From there she got a Protestant and a richly humanistic tradition. Lanyer's two extended prose pieces 'To the Vertuous Reader' and 'To the Doubtfull Reader' in her volume of poems *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, which will be properly introduced and discussed in Chapter 2, in fact strongly suggest that she received an education based on Roger Ascham's pedagogical technique of double translation, an approach that consists in translating a selection from Cicero, first from Latin to English, then back from English to Latin. This method forms in the student the basis for a rigorous and rich education in English as well as Latin. In the case of Lanyer's prose epistle 'To the Vertuosus Reader' and dedicatory poem 'To the Lady Margaret' this education stands out because both pieces are Ciceronian in the use of dependent clauses and parallels and of rhetorical figures and constructions. Moreover, the rhetorical

[12] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 4.
[13] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 5.

sophistication of Lanyer's poems and the ease of her references to classical figures are the clearest evidence of a humanist education.[14]

In the sixteenth century, children of privileged families were generally educated from the ages of seven to fourteen, then only young men had the possibility to go to university, an option that in any case was not available to young ladies. However, it was possible for them to continue their tutorials less formally. Aemilia Lanyer's association with the dowager countess of Kent probably ended around September 1581 when the dowager countess remarried, and Aemilia was probably twelve. When Aemilia's education in the dowager countess's household ended and she probably returned to live with her mother, with whom she appears to have been close.[15]

During her adult life Aemilia Lanyer was ambitious for preferment and fortune. She spent some time at court, and she became the mistress of Henry Carey, Lord Hundson. Carey was Queen Elizabeth's cousin and he became lord chamberlain in 1583.[16] It is not surprising that the lord chamberlain, who was also responsible for music and court entertainments, encountered Aemilia Bassano – the daughter, niece, and cousin to highly prized court musicians. They began their affair in 1589, when she was twenty and he was over sixty[17] and everything we know about their relationship comes from Simon Forman's Diary. Forman (1552-1611) was an Elizabethan astrologer, occultist and herbalist whom Aemilia often consulted for astrological advice and help on her marital affairs and difficult pregnancies. She reported to Forman that the relationship with Carey

[14] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 11.
[15] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 15.
[16] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 16.
[17] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 17.

lasted more than a year, and that she had a son who was born in 1593 whom she named Henry and whose father was most likely Lord Hunsdon. Their affair presumably ended with her marriage to Alfonso Lanyer in 1592.

Alfonso Lanyer was the second son of Nicholas Lanier, a flautist of Henri II's musical entourage. Like his father, Alfonso became a court musician, and after marrying Aemilia he assumed the position of the recorder player, which was once the position assumed by Baptista Bassano.[18] As Forman reports, Aemilia mentioned that her husband despoiled her of her goods. Thus left her with many debts on top of those left by her mother and her brother-in-law. It is not clear if Lanyer exaggerated her financial difficulties; however, there is substantial indication that her husband was an adventuresome schemer. He served the earl of Essex on two piratical trips, first to the Azores in 1597 and then again in Ireland in 1599. He was also involved in petitions and litigations after negotiating for property and patents, yet among his friends he counted some very important people like both archbishops of Canterbury and Dublin. Nevertheless, he was never knighted, nor did he receive the benefit from his hay and grain patent.[19]

Lanyer had the desire to regain some of her lost status in income and social standing and this is one of the main reasons why she went to see Forman. Her access to court seems to have indeed ended after getting married, but she never abandoned her longing for the high-born acquaintances she made the years before.[20] The other main reason why Aemilia went to see Forman is her difficult pregnancies. It appears in fact that

[18] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 19.
[19] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 20.
[20] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 19.

she and Alfonso wanted to have kids together, but she continued to have miscarriages. But while she was seeking help, which at first Forman gave to her, he used his profession to attract distressed women and seduce them. His diaries make frequent reference to his sexual conquests, and while Alfonso was away at sea Forman allowed himself to believe that Aemilia might entertain him sexually. It is not clear if she rejected him or not, however Forman would surely have specified a sexual liaison given his inclination to declare his sexual conquests. After the astrologer betrayed her confidence then, she stopped seeing him for two and a half years. Aemilia and Alfonso eventually managed to have a daughter, Odillya, who was baptized in December 1598 but died almost one year later.[21] Losing her child must have been particularly painful for Aemilia, especially after her history of miscarriages, and this is presumably the reason why she attempted to ask for help approaching Foreman again.

We do not know where Aemilia and Alfonso lived and if they lived together, but what is relevant from the records of Alfonso's activities during the first decade of the seventeenth century, is that sometime during the decade Aemilia was at Cookham, a royal manor that was located a few miles from Windsor. There she was in the company of Margaret Clifford countess of Cumberland and her daughter Anne. The sojourn at Cookham 'provided the impetus for Aemilia Lanyer's volume of poems'[22] *Salve Deux Rex Judaeorum*, probably because the stay at the manor may have seemed a return to the aristocratic glory that Lanyer missed. The first decade of the century is therefore of crucial importance in 'Lanyer's definition of self and the female subject that she seeks to advance

[21] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 28.
[22] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 29.

in her poetry'[23]. Aemilia's role in the countess's household probably was of a gentlewoman servant with some responsibilities for the education of Anne Clifford. She was some sort of music tutor since the hints in Lanyer's poem 'The Description of Cooke-ham'[24], though she may also have helped Anne with French and Italian.

In 1613 Alfonso died, and with him went the benefits of his pension as a royal musician. Aemilia signed the hay and grain patent she inherited from the husband over to his brother Innocent Lanyer, and both agreed that he would get it extended and they would split the earnings. However, this arrangement had complications that put her in dispute with Alfonso's relatives in the 1630s and it is unclear what portion of the patent she received.[25]

Another significant part of Aemilia's life is the one of the school she ran from 1617 until the summer of 1619 in the wealthy suburb of St. Giles in the Field, her only activity after Alfonso's death about which we have any detail. This activity may have lasted longer if it had not been for a dispute over rent and repairs with her landlord. The dispute seems to have ended the enterprise.[26]

Not much more is known about Aemilia Lanyer's life. She was buried at St. James Clerkenwell in 1645:[27] she had lived seventy-six years first under the reign of Elizabeth I, then of James I and lastly of Charles I. It was a very long life for the time, during which

[23] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 29.

[24] Aemilia Lanyer, 'The Description of Cooke-ham' in *Salve Deus Rex Judeaorum*: *Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney, and Aemilia Lanyer: Renaissance Women Poets*, ed. by Danielle Clarke, and Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 437.

[25] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 32.

[26] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 32.

[27] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 33.

she enjoyed access to the public and powerful world of court, she hoped to retrieve some of that comfortable living through her ambitious husband and as the hope faded, she sought to regain a sense of power through her affiliation with the countess of Cumberland.

1.3 The Dark Lady

One of the first accounts of Aemilia Lanyer as a writer can be found in George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, Who Have Been Celebrated for their Writings, or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Science* (1752) in which he wrote the names of over sixty women writers including both eminent women such as Catherine of Aragon, Katherine Parr, Elizabeth I, and women whose memory had been lost, sketching the traces of a diverse range of early women poets, including Aemilia Lanyer.[28] The poet then was more recently rediscovered when Alfred Leslie Rowse, British historian and writer, announced in 1973 that he was trying to identify the 'dark lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets, and declared the mysterious woman to be Aemilia Lanyer.[29] Rowse attempted to trace the identity of Shakespeare's 'dark lady' through what he called the historical method, which however presents some problematic assumptions. The very first mistake Rowse made is reading Shakespeare's sonnets as autobiographical.[30] This assumption and his method led him to pursue one-to-one correspondences while leaving out important details.[31] According to Rowse's historical

[28] George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, Who Have Been Celebrated for their Writings, or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Science* (Oxford: W. Jackson, 1752), p. vii.
[29] David Bevington, 'A. L. Rowse's Dark Lady', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, ed. by Marshall Grossman (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), p. 10.
[30] Bevington, 'A. L. Rowse's Dark Lady', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 11.
[31] Bevington, 'A. L. Rowse's Dark Lady', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 11.

method the sonnets are autobiographical, therefore the expert historian can find direct correspondences for the figures appearing in the sonnets. Indeed, not only did Rowse in his 1973 version of Shakespeare's Sonnets declared that the mystery of the dark lady was solved, but he also claimed he had identified Shakespeare's rival poet.[32] Rowse, basing his statements on dubious reasoning, reaches the conclusion that Marlowe is the most suitable candidate for Shakespeare's adversary. But Rowse's interpretation quickly shifts from plausible biographical connections to his perceptions of the protagonists' emotional states, ending up with oversimplified results based on his personal judgment.

The highlight of Rowse's work is the dark lady. Rowse started from his long-standing belief that it is impossible to find out who Shakespeare's mistress was, but then he managed to discover biographically who she was, only thanks to his method.[33] The proof of the biographical accuracy of the sonnets would lie in the poet's vivid realism, and this generalization assumes that what Shakespeare narrates arises essentially from actual experience, without using his extraordinary poetic imagination. As evidence of Rowse's reluctance to consider the complex and multiple meanings of words, he argued that Shakespeare in Sonnet 128 says that the dark lady 'is musical'. The sonnet describes how the lady in question often plays an instrument that appears to be a spinet or virginal or harpsichord, the 'jacks' of which touch the palm of the player's hand. The term 'jacks' is oddly used; technically it means the upright pieces of wood fitted to the back of the key-levers and provided with quills to pluck the strings as the keys are pressed down by the performer. But Rowse simply glossed 'jacks' as 'keys' without considering Shakespeare's use as poetic license because of his liking for straightforward,

[32] Bevington, 'A. L. Rowse's Dark Lady', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 15.
[33] Bevington, 'A. L. Rowse's Dark Lady', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 16.

commonsense interpretation that misses several significant nuances.[34] But most importantly, given that in the Renaissance ladies of the court and in good families were expected to know how to play an instrument, can this indication of musical performance be taken as proof that the dark lady 'is musical'? According to Rowse it can: in fact his candidate for the dark lady is Aemilia Lanyer, the daughter of a court musician who became mistress of Henry Carey, first Baron Hunsdon, patron of Shakespeare's theater company the Lord Chamberlain's Men.[35] Rowse's main source for Lanyer's biography is the personal diary of Forman,[36] whose opinion of Aemilia was not the best. First, he wanted to see what benefit there was for him in helping her and proceeded to wonder whether the lady might receive him sexually. In Forman's diary there is no proof whether Aemilia actually received him sexually or not, but at the upshot of the series of their encounters he complains that she was a woman of easy virtue and treated him poorly.[37] This and other entries in his diary attest to an interest in exploiting women sexually and reveal a misogynistic turn of mind. We do not know whether these accusations have any real basis or are the product of his own disappointment with Aemilia. But Rowse takes Forman at his word and labels the dark lady as 'no better than she should have been',[38] imagining a corrupt and dissolute woman who provoked in Shakespeare all the manifestations of self-loathing present in the sonnets. Rowse one more time made crucial mistakes and his candidate for the dark lady is left with dubious qualifications. Indeed, it is appropriate to ask whether there is any evidence that Aemilia was really a dissolute

[34] Bevington, 'A. L. Rowse's Dark Lady', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 17.
[35] Bevington, 'A. L. Rowse's Dark Lady', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 10.
[36] Bevington, 'A. L. Rowse's Dark Lady', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 18.
[37] Bevington, 'A. L. Rowse's Dark Lady', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 20.
[38] Alfred L. Rowse, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. by Alfred Leslie Rowse (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. xxi.

woman – apart from the account of a misogynistic astrologer who may have been angered by his failure with her – and whether Shakespeare would have thought it wise to pursue a woman who was the mistress of Lord Hunsdon, patron of the poet's company.

Despite Rowse's typical male response to a woman that, according to his research, is 'no better than she should be' and despite picturing Aemilia Lanyer as a woman of easy virtue, he has done so much more for her reputation than he could have imagined possible. In fact, the historian has convinced almost no one by picturing her as Shakespeare's dark lady. On the contrary, Lanyer has turned out to be a determined, independent woman writer who made a significant contribution to the Renaissance poetic corpus.[39]

[39] Bevington, 'A. L. Rowse's Dark Lady', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 23.

2 – *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*

2.1 The Work

Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum is the only known volume of poems written by Aemilia Lanyer. She wrote it during her sojourn at Cookham, which 'provided the impetus'[40] for her composition. In the 'coda' of the volume Lanyer tells the reader that she came up with the title through a dream she had long before she had any intent to write the poems.[41] The work was officially published in 1611 by Valentine Simmes and sold by Richard Bonian,[42] and tells the story of the Passion of Christ. The Passion of Christ refers to the last events in Jesus Christ's life, the most central events for Christian faith. *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is a significant work as far as the world of early women writers is concerned because Aemilia Lanyer 'may have been the first Englishwoman to publish a full edition of poems and to claim for herself a professional poetic voice'.[43] This volume of poems is also important in terms of feminism because the author decided to take the most important elements of Christian theology and retell the story of Christ's death from a female perspective. In the prose piece 'To the Vertuous Reader' the author indeed clarifies the central theme of her work:

> in respect it pleased our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, without the assistance of man, beeing free from originall and all other sinnes, from the time of his conception, till the houre of his death, to be begotten of a woman, borne of a woman, nourished of a woman, obedient to a woman; and that he healed woman, pardoned women, comforted women: yea, even when he was in his greatest agonie and bloodie sweat, going to be crucified, and also in the last houre of his death, tooke care to dispose of a woman: after his resurrection,

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[40] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 29.

[41] Susanne Woods, 'Introduction', in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, ed. by Susanne Woods (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. xxxi.

[42] Woods, 'Introduction', in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, p. xli.

[43] Woods, 'Introduction', in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, p. xv.

> appeared first to a woman, sent a woman to declare his most glorious resurrection to the rest of his Disciples.[44]

Even though scholars tend to focus on the potential Jewish origins of the Bassanos,[45] Lanyer's poetry reveal that she was Protestant and that she knew the Scriptures well. Her version of Christ's Passion closely follows Matthew's gospel, which is the only evangelist that wrote about Procula's warning to her husband Pilate – who was to judge Jesus – telling him to show mercy, but the poet also borrows references about women from wherever they appear in the other gospels.

Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum was published as 'an attractive quarto'[46] divided into three parts. The first part contains the prefatory material including eleven dedicatory pieces, nine of which are poems in which the author dedicates her work to virtuous ladies, while 'To the Vertuous Reader' and 'To the Ladie Margaret' are prose pieces. The dedicatory pieces to the virtuous women present the essential Christian virtues – patience, goodness, piety, faith and love of God, humility, grace, and charity – in the figures of contemporary ladies. 'The quality of obedience, so highly valued by contemporary theoreticians on feminine conduct, is markedly absent', pointing a clear stance against how women were expected to behave by and towards men in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England.[47]

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[44] Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Iudæorum,* in *Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney, and Aemilia Lanyer: Renaissance Women Poets*, ed. by Danielle Clarke, and Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 370

[45] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 5.

[46] Woods, 'Introduction', in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, p. xxxi.

[47] Trina Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices. Women as Writers and Translators of Literature in the English Reanissance* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 106.

The second part contains the poem *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, which in turn is divided into four parts inclusive of 'The passion of Christ', 'Eves Apologie in Defence of Women', 'The Teares of the Daughters of Jerusalem' and 'The Salutation and Sorrow of the Virgine Marie.' This central part of the poem narrates Christ's passion, it 'justifies the importance of women to Christianity'[48] and at the same time narrates the central experience of the lives of the contemporary ladies to which the entire work is dedicated. In this section, when Lanyer depicts Jesus dying on the cross, she wants to praise spiritual strength over physical might, a lesson that according to the author gives women some prominence. With their spiritual power, women have the ability to see clearly, in contrast to the men who accuse and hit Jesus instead.

The third part of the volume consists of two last pieces: 'The Description of Cooke-ham', an early example of a country-house poem, and 'To the Doubtfull Reader', a short prose epistle. 'The Description of Cooke-ham' is most likely the first printed poem of the country-house poem tradition in seventeenth-century England, and praises the estate of the Countess of Cumberland as being a lost Garden of Eden for women, recalling the literary topos of the *locus amoenus* and seeing in nature the mirror of human emotions. This is 'a device firmly grounded in the pastoral tradition and its English representations'.[49] This poem 'therefore concludes the volume with an unmistakable claim for the poet's classical role as a participant in the social order she celebrates'.[50]

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[48] Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987), p. 182.
[49] Woods, 'Introduction', in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, p. xl.
[50] Woods, 'Introduction', in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, p. xli.

The three different parts into which the work is divided are not rigorous partitions, on the contrary they overlap and blend in terms of themes and images.

Lanyer wrote *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* with the intent to praise women, to defend them from male defamation, and more importantly to emphasize their crucial importance as Christians. She portrays her sex as the protector of the Christian spirit and, in her celebration of Jesus, she declares him as the true origin of feminine virtue. Her collection begins optimistically with symbols of triumph and goes on celebrating women, placing them as the protectors of the heart of Christianity. 'Her poem opposes the fallen, ungodly world with a vision predicated upon Christian ideals, manifested first by Christ himself, and then by women.'[51] Although the volume begins optimistically and proceeds to celebrate women as preservers of the heart of Christian doctrine, the author eventually painfully recognizes the large gap between her human wishes for a redeemed womanhood and their realization.

Her vision of Christianity with women at the center of it may have seemed too revolutionary if not outrageous for the time. Nevertheless, she felt legitimized to write about such a delicate subject as Christian faith thanks to the 'inability topos as a human inadequacy before God'.[52] She confesses her inability as a divine poet, and by doing this the poet is identified as a true Christian underscoring 'the piety of her attempt to praise Christ and to clarify the nature of women'.[53] In the 28th and 29th stanzas of *Salve Deus* she expresses her weakness for the task more than once 'comparing herself to the

[51] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 181.
[52] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 184.
[53] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 184.

over-reachers, Icarus and Phaeton'[54] and asks God to give her the force and power to write about such an holy subject:

> But my deare Muse, now wither wouldst thou flie,
> Above the pitch of thy appointed straine?
> With Icarus thou sleekest now to trie,
> Not waxen wings, but thy poore barren Braine,
> Which farre too weake, these siely lines descrie;
> Yet cannot this thy forward Mind restraine,
> But thy poore Infant Verse must soare aloft,
> Not fearing threat'ning dangers, happening oft.
>
> Thinke when the eye of Wisdom shall discover
> Thy weakling Muse to flie, that scarce could creepe,
> And in the Ayre above the Clowdes to hover,
> When better 'twere mued up, and fast asleepe;
> They'l thinke with Paheton, thou canst neare recover,
> But helplesse with that poore yong Lad to weepe:
> The little World of thy weake Wit on fire,
> Where thou wilt perish in thine owne desire. (ll. 273-288)

Overall, as a consequence of the author's attempt to redeem women by making them the central symbols of Christian faith, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* may seem societal rather than religious. Aemilia Lanyer surely wanted women to be treated differently in Jacobean society, especially when it came to financial problems and inheritance. She wished for daughters to be legitimized and considered as much as their brothers in terms of possessions and inheritance and wanted women to have the possibility to be independent. She tried to free women from their condition of subordination and inferiority by going back up to the origins and defending Eve, the very first woman in her 'Eves Apologie in defence of Women'. In her writings she indeed takes into consideration the blame that was given to Eve and re-explains the episode of the forbidden fruit under a completely different light, demonstrating that Adam was equally responsible if not completely responsible for their banishment from Eden. In *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* then the attack to women's condition in

[54] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 194.

seventeenth-century England and religious poetry are two aspects strictly intertwined and not simple to divide.

2.2 Style and themes

Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum contains 230 rhyme royal stanzas that give proof of Lanyer's rhetorical control and sophistication, which she learned at a young age during her stay at Susan Bertie's dowager countess of Kent household. As I already mentioned in section 1.2, the poet received a humanist education with particular attention to classic authors like Virgil, Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, and Ovid. The influence of the classics is evident by the forms and style of both her poems and prose pieces.[55] The rhythmic power given to her sentences by parallelism and figures of repetition stands out in a particular passage of 'To the Vertuous Reader':

> […] all women deserve not to be blamed though some forgetting they are women themselves, and in danger to be condemned by the words of their owne mouthes, fall into so great an errour, as to speake unadvisedly against the rest of their sexe; which if it be true, I am perswaded they can shew their owne imperfection in nothing more: and therefore could wish (for their owne ease, modesties, and credit) they would referre such points of folly, to be practised by evill disposed men, who forgetting they were borne of women, nourished of women, and that if it were not by the means of women they would be quite extinguished out of the world, and a finall ende of them all, doe like Vipers deface the wombes wherein they were bred, onely to give way and utterance to their want of discretion and goodnesse.[56]

'This is Ciceronian hypotactic periodicity, with a series of dependent clauses building toward a summary conclusion reinforced by a simile'.[57]

Lanyer's poetry is distinguished by her broad use of metaphors, by her repeated references to classical figures and stories, but also by several mentions of Greek

[55] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 10.
[56] Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Iudæorum,* p. 369
[57] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 11.

mythology characters. For example, in the first few stanzas of her dedication ‘To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie’ she celebrates the queen’s virtues referring to various Greek goddesses like Athena, Artemis and Hera:

> Renowned Empresse, and great Britaines Queene,
> Most gratious Mother of succeeding Kings;
> Vouchsafe to view that which is seldome seene,
> A Womans writing of divinest things:
> Reade it faire Queene, though it defective be,
> Your excellence can grace both It and Mee.
>
> For you have rifled Nature of her store,
> And all the Goddesses have dispossest
> Of those rich gifts which they enjoy’d before,
> But now great Queene, in you they all doe rest.
> If now they strived for the golden Ball,
> Paris would give it you before them all.
>
> From Juno you have State and Dignities,
> From warlike Pallas, Wisdome, Fortitude;
> And from faire Venus all her Excellencies,
> With their best parts your Highnesse is indu’d:
> How much are we to honor those that springs
> From such rare beauty, in the blood of Kings?
>
> The Muses doe attend upon your Throne,
> With all the Artists at your becke and call;
> The Sylvane Gods, and Satyres every one,
> Before your faire triumphant Chariot fall:
> And shining Cynthia with her nymphs attend
> To honour you, whose Honour hath no end.
>
> From your bright spheare of greatnes where you sit,
> Reflecting light to all those glorious stars
> That wait upon your Throane;
> To virtue yet Vouchsafe that splendor which my meannesse bars:
> Be like faire Phoebe, who doth love to grace
> The darkest night with her most beauteous face. (ll. 1-30)

The most important theme throughout the volume is of course Christian faith, through which Aemilia Lanyer attempts to redeem women, but another recurring theme in Lanyer’s writing is the theme of nature. Nature for the poet is the source of her creativity and also a divine creature, therefore her art is created thanks to God, and the author often claims nature’s protection for her own work. But nature is not just the source of the author’s art, it is also the source of feminine art in general because

'women accurately translate Nature, God's book, into sacred poetry'.[58] Overall, therefore, nature is considered positively, except when it comes to physical beauty:

> That pride of Nature which adornes the faire,
> Like blasing Comets to allure all eies,
> Is but the thred, that weaves their web of Care,
> Who glories most, where most their danger lies;
> For greatest perills do attend the faire,
> When men do seeke, attempt, plot and devise,
> How they may overthrow the chastest Dame,
> Whose Beautie is the White whereat they aime. (ll. 201-208)

Physical beauty is a topic often considered by male poets and according to the author it is dangerous because it causes men to be schemers and tempters, losing sight of good virtues. Lanyer also brings examples of women like Cleopatra and Helen of Troy who were both betrayed by their outward beauty. Apart from physical beauty, nature is still a divine creature and has the significant function of 'Mother of perfection'[59] that vigils on Lanyer's work.

Lastly, the motif that will resonate throughout the poem is the glorification of Margaret Clifford, the countess of Cumberland and 'how the countess's life subjects earth's temporary afflictions to heaven's immortal beauties.'[60] The entire volume written by Aemilia Lanyer is indeed dedicated to several distinguished women but the dedication to Margaret Clifford does not stop at her dedicatory piece, instead the author praises the countess of Cumberland from beginning to end. This last topic will be discussed further in the third chapter.

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[58] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 189.
[59] Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Iudæorum*, p. 343.
[60] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 193.

2.3 'The Description of Cooke-ham'

Before diving straight into the dedications, it is only right to spend a few lines on the first printed poem in the tradition of country house poems. 'To Penshurst' by Ben Jonson (1572-1637), English playwright and poet, is the poem usually cited as founding the genre of country-house poems in seventeenth-century England. Lanyer's 'The Description of Cooke-ham,' however, predates Jonson's poem by five years. 'Editors usually assume that Jonson's poem was written sometime before late 1612'[61] because of his reference in the text to King James in company with his son Prince Henry, who died in November 1612. It is not clear which poem was composed first, but 'The Description of Cooke-ham' is undoubtedly the first in print, being published between 1610 and 1611, while 'To Penshurst' first appeared in 1616.[62]

'The Description of Cooke-ham' is about the days Lanyer spent in the country at the royal manor of Cookham, Berkshire, in the company of two noble ladies: the countesses Margaret Clifford, and her daughter Anne Clifford. The pastoral piece is an elegy for a lost feminine Christian paradise where all the natural elements, plants, animals, and humans live in perfect harmony.

> The Walkes put on their summer Liveries,
> And all things else did hold like similies:
> The Trees with leaves, with fruits, with owers clad,
> Embrac'd each other, seeming to be glad,
> Turning themselves to beauteous Canopies,
> To shade the bright Sunne from your brighter eies:
> The cristall Streames with silver spangles graced,
> While by the glorious Sunne they were embraced:
> The little Birds in chirping notes did sing,
> To entertaine both You and that sweet Spring. (ll. 21-30)

[61] Woods, 'Introduction', in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, p. xxxix.
[62] Woods, 'Introduction', in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, p. xxxix.

This lost Eden is inhabited only by the poet and the two countesses without villagers, men, servants, or visitors.

The poem blends together three different poetic traditions; the praise of the idealized natural landscape and of the estate refer to both *locus amoenus* and pastoral tradition, but the poem is also an ode to a patron: Margaret Clifford. Margaret Clifford is celebrated throughout the entire volume of Lanyer's poems and in particular in 'The Description of Cooke-ham' she is seen as a godly woman blessing nature and the estate with her virtues. The countess is not only a godly creature without whom the lost Eden of Cookham loses its brightness, light and harmony, she is also 'a reminder of the transience and emotional tolls of patrilinear inheritance'.[63] The Cookham estate was a royal manor in Berkshire in the possession of the Russell family, precisely of William Russell of Thornhaugh, Margaret Clifford's brother.[64] Upon Margaret's husband death in 1605, the ownership of Cookham reverted to her son Francis Clifford instead of becoming property of the countess dowager who was already occupying the manor.[65] Moreover, the inheritance of the estate passed directly to Francis, skipping the Earl's first child Anne. Thus, once again, Aemila Lanyer acknowledges barriers of class and gendered customs that, like the countess dowager, she experienced personally when between 1617 and 1619 she founded a school in St. Giles in the Field and had a dispute with the landlord over rent and building repairs, complaining that the terms of their agreement were not at her favor at all.[66]

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[63] Patricia Demers, *Women's Writing in English: Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2005), p. 207.
[64] Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*, p. 29.
[65] Demers, *Women's Writing in English*, p. 207.
[66] Woods, 'Introduction', in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, p. xxviii.

As a result, Lanyer's poetry could be described as a mixture of narratives, encomiums and elegies shifting from one genre to the other whenever she wanted to move from the narration of biblical episodes to the praise of a patron. In other words, Aemilia Lanyer 'despite her disavowals, did not fear to tread where angels walked.'[67]

[67] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 207.

3 – Lanyer's dedications

3.1 Feminism and patronage

In this last chapter of my dissertation, I will try to lay out some different opinions on Aemilia Lanyer's bid for patronage and feminism that exist regarding her dedicatory pieces. Some critics claim that Lanyer was 'a radical proto-feminist who aim[ed] at freeing women from patriarchy by empowering women with knowledge'.[68] They concentrate on the feminist ideals of the dedications arguing that they serve as a powerful testament to Lanyer's complex relationship with the patronage system, her assertion of female agency, and her fervent advocacy for women's rights and social equality. Tina Krontiris for example states that Lanyer 'was apparently an assertive and unconventional woman'[69] who was also strong, independent and able to exploit the court's 'formative environment'[70] to her advantage. A formative environment from which she possibly learned maneuvering skills, gained confidence, and made 'powerful friends and acquaintances'[71] which most likely played a significant role in her choice of patrons. On the other hand, one may argue that Lanyer's feminism in the dedications, but also throughout the volume of poems in general, is swinging and subordinate to the principal dedicatee of her work: Margaret Clifford countess dowager of Cumberland.[72] The entire volume of poems in fact revolves around the countess who appears to be the inspiration, the actual protagonist and principal dedicatee of the poems. Thus, from this point of view

[68] Agnieszka Markiewicz, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum: A New Gospel for Women by Women', *Honors College Theses*, 21 (2005), p. 2.
[69] Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices*, p. 103.
[70] Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices*, p. 102.
[71] Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices*, p. 102.
[72] Leeds Barroll, 'Looking for Patrons', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, ed. by Marshall Grossman (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), p. 39.

Lanyer's advocacy for women may only appear to be so because she praises Margaret Clifford throughout *Salve Deus* and because she tries to attract only women patrons. This specific aspect will be further discussed in the following sections.

The English Renaissance was an era of profound cultural and intellectual transformation that saw the flourishing of a variety of art forms, in particular literature. In this expanding artistic and intellectual landscape, patronage played a central role. Patronage consisted in a symbolic relationship between artists and patrons, often involving financial support and the exchange of favors. Wealthy people, aristocrats, clergy, and merchants became benefactors, supporting poets and other artists to enhance their prestige and legacy. In return, poets dedicated their works to their patrons, crafting verses that celebrated their virtues, accomplishments, and lineage. While patronage provided financial stability for poets, it also posed challenges to artistic expression. Hence, during Renaissance the literary genre of patronage poems emerged. There poets used elevated language to express gratitude and admiration for their benefactors, navigating a delicate balance between creativity and flattery. The reciprocal relationship between poet and benefactor allowed both parties to bask in the cultural and social value derived from artistic endeavors. The poems composed for patrons were then expected to exalt their virtues and achievements, even if it meant idealizing or exaggerating certain aspects. This tension between artistic integrity and the demands of patrons underscores the complex nature of Renaissance patronage.[73]

Regarding Lanyer's dedications, early critical response during the 1970s and the 1980s initially considered the author presumptuous 'upon tenuous or nonexistent

[73] Werner L. Gundersheimer, 'Patronage in the Renaissance: An Explanatory Approach', *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. by Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 3-7.

aristocratic connections balanced by a kind of grudging Johnsonian compliment'[74] and judged her poems inappropriate, embarrassingly long, and apparently sycophantic. This first skeptical opinion was plausibly a result of gender inequality: a well-established tradition of patronage poems written by the vast majority by men poets could not include the poems of a woman who completely changed the way of addressing a woman patron. 'Only the sustained work of second-generation Lanyer scholars has begun to bring her patronage poems into critical focus.'[75]

Over time, then, Lanyer's poems have been analyzed under a more critical and objective look to underline all the relevant aspects about her dedicatory pieces, moving from their style and themes to their purposes and intentions.

Particularly, various non-literary factors have been under scrutiny concerning her bid for patronage that likely contributed to the unsuccessful outcome of it.[76] Such factors revolve around the author's social environment, her personal connections to it and the challenges it presented for her.

One of Lanyer's unconventional activities 'that might have deeply compromised her bid for patronage – if patronage is what she sought'[77] is her skill in employing rhetoric, notably in her interaction with one specific noble figure, the Dowager Countess of Cumberland. She intertwined the praise of the countess with the poem, giving her a nearly monopolistic prominence. The praise of this patron in fact begins with several lines of prose dedication to the countess, followed by dedicatory verses to other members of the

[74] Kari Boyd McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, ed. by Marshall Grossman (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), p. 60.
[75] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 60.
[76] Barroll, 'Looking for Patrons', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 29.
[77] Barroll, 'Looking for Patrons', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 39.

nobility, and the actual *Salve Deus* begins with a 256-line preamble specifically addressing her. Additionally, the countess is invoked three more times in italicized marginal glosses which mention her name.[78] Finally, also the closing poem about Cookham revolves around the countess and her daughter.[79] 'Obviously, the problem with such an emphasis, from the viewpoint of the poet seeking patronage of multiple dedicatees (as Lanyer seems to have been), is that it wagers all on one throw.'[80] By weaving the countess into the fabric of the whole work, Lanyer may have unintentionally established a hierarchical emphasis, potentially impacting her interactions with the other nobles she sought to engage with in her work, even if in an unconventional and perhaps inexperienced manner.[81]

Plus, there is the obvious issue of gender that needs to be considered. As she sought Court patronage, Lanyer found herself in a highly competitive arena, contending with accomplished male poets who were already privileged due to their gender. These poets possessed significant political knowledge and experience and were backed by very influential sponsors – things that Lanyer did not have.[82] But even if Aemilia Lanyer had been male, the arrangement of the dedications in her volume would had probably been unwise. If Lanyer's aspiration was to enter Queen Anne's inner circle, her major mistake could indeed have been that of placing the highly influential Countess of Bedford after the Dowager Countess of Pembroke.[83] The complete list of the dedications appear in this order: 'To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie', 'To all vertuous Ladies in generall',

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[78] Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Iudæorum,* in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*, ed. by Susanne Woods (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 51, 57, 62, 101, 108, 122.
[79] Barroll, 'Looking for Patrons', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 39.
[80] Barroll, 'Looking for Patrons', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 39.
[81] Barroll, 'Looking for Patrons', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 39.
[82] Barroll, 'Looking for Patrons', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 42.
[83] Barroll, 'Looking for Patrons', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 40.

'The Authors Dreame to the Ladie Marie, the Countesse Dowager of Pembrooke', 'To the Ladie Lucie, Countesse of Bedford', 'To the Ladie Margaret, Countesse Dowager of Cumberland', 'To the Ladie Anne, Countesse of Dorcet', and 'To the Vertuous reader'. This arrangement did not adequately align with the influential circle of the queen Anne 'which operated as the cultural center at Court.'[84]

Finally, among Lanyer's selection of dedicatees there is Lady Arabella Stuart, a highly intellectually gifted woman and King James's first cousin. This choice had unfortunate consequences because, unluckily, Lady Arabella experienced a downfall starting in 1609,[85] just a few years before *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*'s publication.

Unpreventable misfortune, a complex Court patronage game, possible lack of experience, gender and a non-aristocratic social and educational background were therefore the elements that made Aemilia Lanyer start off disadvantaged and contributed to the unsuccessful outcome of her bid for patronage. However, these may also be the very factors that made her bid admirably bold and remarkable.[86]

In Lanyer's poems desire for patronage and feminism coexist. Throughout her work the author's feminism can appear nonetheless to be see-sawing; an example of this can be found in her 'Eves Apologie in defence of Women' which attempts to redeem Eve from the original sin and at first glance may seem to be a clear stance in favor of women. Lanyer in fact tries to defend the very first woman to have existed. However, the author's argument turns out to be more condescending towards Eve rather than feminist because it 'relies on the classic definition of woman as the lesser creature'[87].

> Our Mother Eve, who tasted of the Tree,

[84] Barroll, 'Looking for Patrons', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 39.
[85] Barroll, 'Looking for Patrons', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 40.
[86] Barroll, 'Looking for Patrons', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 42.
[87] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 196.

Giving to Adam what shee held most deare,
Was simply good, and had no powre to see,
The after-comming harme did not appeare:
The subtile Serpent that our Sex betraide,
Before our fall so sure a plot had laide.

That undiscerning Ignorance perceav'd
No guile, or craft that was by him intended;
For had she knowne, of what we were bereav'd
To his request she had not condescended.
But she (poor soule) by cunning was deceav'd,
No hurt therein her harmlesse Heart intended:
For she alleadg'd Gods word, which he denies,
That they should die, but even as Gods, be wise.

[...] And then to lay the fault on Patience backe,
That we (poore women) must endure it all;
We know right well he did discretion lacke,
Beeing not perswaded thereunto at all;
If Eve did erre, it was for knowledge sake,
The fruit being faire perswaded him to fall:
No subtill Serpents falsehood did betray him,
If he would eate it, who had powre to stay him?

Not Eve, whose fault was onely too much love,
Which made her give this present to her Deare,
That what shee tastes, he likewise might prove,
Whereby his knowledge might become more cleare;
He never sought her weaknesse to reprove,
Whith those sharpe words, which he of God did heare:
Yet Men will boeast of Knowledge, which he tooke
From Eves fair hand, as from a learned Booke. (ll. 763-808)

In these few stanzas of 'Eves Apologie in Defence of Women', Lanyer exonerates Eve from any responsibility for original sin by stating that in the Bible, God gave knowledge to Adam, the man. Hence, the latter is accountable for accepting blame, as he possessed the strength and awareness of God's commandments even prior to Eve's creation and decided not to share what he knew about the Tree of Knowledge with Eve. Therefore, the responsibility for original sin falls on his shoulders. When Eve gives him the forbidden fruit, he agrees to eat it with her without distrusting the serpent's words. It can be argued that this portrayal of events certainly makes Eve seem innocent but may not be considered feminist since the definition of feminism entails 'advocacy of equality

of the sexes';[88] here the first woman to have existed is depicted as an inferior creature incapable of understanding that the serpent is lying due to 'her naïve attitude and lack of knowledge [that] made her an easy target for temptation.'[89]

On the other hand, Lanyer manages to build a narrative of advocacy in favor of women upon this very demonstration in which Eve is indeed portrayed as a subordinate being, but the focus is on Adam and on the reason why his sin is far more crucial. In fact, Eve is willing to do anything in order to gain and share knowledge with Adam, while he, the one who is supposed to be her protector, keeps knowledge for himself.[90] The different motivations behind eating the forbidden apple then are the device that Lanyer employs to 'shift the discussion of culpability on to Adam. Since it is evident that Eve eats the fruit for Adam's sake, it becomes clear that he eats the fruit for his own sake.'[91]. Moving from this argument, Lanyer resumes the narration of Christ's passion, also demonstrating her abilities to make digressions without interrupting the story or losing the thread of discourse and moves on recalling Claudia Procula's warning to his husband Pilate. 'Witnesse thy wife (O Pilate) speakes for all; / Who did but dreame, and yet a message sent' (ll. 834-835): here the female character is not portrayed as a subordinate being, quite the opposite. Claudia Procula is no responsible for a major sin like the original sin, on the contrary she is the person, the woman, who tries to prevent Pilate to commit the most serious sin: Christ's death.

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[88] 'Feminism' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], < https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=feminism> [accessed 17 November 2023].
[89] Markiewicz, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum: A New Gospel for Women by Women', *Honors College Theses*, p. 3.
[90] Markiewicz, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum: A New Gospel for Women by Women', *Honors College Theses*, pp. 3-4.
[91] Markiewicz, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum: A New Gospel for Women by Women', *Honors College Theses*, p. 5.

Aemilia Lanyer has taken the traditional portrayal of the woman as the lesser creature continuously used by men against women and intelligently turned it into a defense of women, demanding that men recognize and acknowledge that women are not inferior to them. The apparent masculinist definition of Eve therefore becomes undoubtedly feminist. Nevertheless, in Lanyer's dedications, seemingly obvious feminist elements take a particular turn risking to sound not feminist at all. This aspect will be further discussed in the following paragraph.

3.2 The dedications

In writing patronage poems Lanyer came across a number of problems, first among them Petrarchism. Petrarchism consisted in the imitation of Francesco Petrarca's poetics, in which at the center of his poems about love there was a woman who represented the object of his desires. Petrarchism and other conventional forms of addressing a female patron consisted in amorous discourse where the male author 'employed the language of love as the framework for defining the client-patron relationship when addressing patronage poems to women.'[92] This tradition was inappropriate for Lanyer to exploit because she could not use love as the foundation of her own client-patron dynamic. Therefore, without a suitable rhetoric of patronage, she solved this problem, like Mary Wroth had already started to do, and 'deleted the man from the exchange […] and introduced alternative rhetorical forms that allowed her to position herself authoritatively in relationship to her patrons.'[93]

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[92] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 63.
[93] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 63.

'Lanyer's rhetoric of patronage subverts the traditional motifs of epideictic'[94] discourse not only by referring to a woman patron without using the common amorous discourse, by frequently erasing rather than highlighting the class distinctions that separate her from her patrons in the poems.[95] Even though Lanyer's language undermines the conventional patronage themes, the author nonetheless focuses on the trope of hospitality, that is an invitation from the poet to the patron to a metaphorical banquet, which is crucial to the definition of the client-patron relationship. Once the problem of amorous discourse is solved, the author proceeds to make her bid for patronage and indeed invites her dedicatees to sit at her banquet. In the dedication to Queen Anne Lanyer writes 'For she must entertaine you to this Feast, To which your Highnesse is the welcom'st guest' (ll. 83-84), where 'she' is the poet that is to entertain the queen at the 'Feast'. Another example can be found in the dedication 'To the Ladie Elizabeths Grace' to the queen's daughter princess Elizabeth in which Lanyer invites her 'unto this wholesome feast' (l. 9).

Once the dedicatees of her work are 'figuratively seated at Lanyer's holy banquet'[96] she compares them with biblical heroines. Lanyer chooses wisely her pantheon of biblical heroines designating six women who represent the typical female virtues in seventeenth century England, such as obedience and patience: Deborah, Jael, the Queen of Sheba, Esther, Judith, and Susanna all from the Old Testament. Deborah, from the book of the Judges, was a biblical prophetess who was the only female judge among the

[94] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 64.
[95] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 64.
[96] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 66.

Judges of Israel while Jael, also from the book of the Judges, was praised by Deborah for her bravery in killing a king and enemy of the Jewish people. The Queen of Sheba is described as a wealthy queen who challenged King Solomon's biblical wisdom; Esther appears in the Bible as a woman of great piety, characterized by her faith and courage; Judith is a courageous heroine who freed the city of Bethulia; and Susanna, whose reputation gets threatened by to men that want to rape her, does not give up her integrity and refuses to be raped in spite of the men's threats to pubicly accuse her of adultery. Five of these heroines in the Bible are never valued for being mothers, a detail that is most likely the reason for the author's choice.[97] In the Bible, motherhood is a frequently highlighted quality when depicting women, and infertility is often seen as a deficiency which sometimes gets figuratively fixed by God. A prime example of this aspect is Abraham's wife Sarah, who is infertile but eventually, when she's ninety years old, God promises her she would miraculously be able to conceive a son and she does in fact give birth to her son Isaac. Lanyer, on the other hand, does the complete opposite and the heroines she depicts are not defined by their ability of giving birth but are defined by their superiority over men. Furthermore, the author flips the biblical representation of these women who in the Bible are introduced by reference to the men in their lives such as their husbands, fathers or children, and she rather introduces them 'by the names of the men they destroyed, linking the women to the exercise of the will of God.'[98] In addition, these heroines are portrayed as strong and independent, but this does not take away their femininity at the risk of appearing androgynous, since in the Bible these heroines are also

[97] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, pp. 66-67.
[98] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 67.

characterized by their beauty. Some of them use make-up and one of them is even persecuted because of her beauty.[99]

It could be argued that this comparison of the dedicatees to biblical heroines falls under the definition of feminism but over time feminist critics' interpretations of Lanyer's poetry have begun to diverge. At first, Lanyer's text may encourage an approach 'motivated by a commitment to some form of feminist criticism.'[100] *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* was written by a woman, was dedicated to women, and was written for women to read. In this text a female author raises her voice on the matter of gender inequality by challenging the traditional patriarchal discourse that has been made around some biblical narrative. 'What more could a feminist critic ask for in a text?'[101] *Salve Deus* illustrates the historical existence of women's writing, signifies women engaging with texts of other women, it seemingly establishes a sense of female community, implies women actively interpreting the scriptures on their own and appears to challenge the legitimacy of inequalities between the sexes. Therefore, early studies of Lanyer's poems collectively praised its female-centered portrayal of an idealized, cooperative sisterhood.

However, while some critics emphasized the importance of *Salve Deus*'s female-centered viewpoint defining Lanyer a feminist, others stressed that 'the historical problematics of using this term had not been adequately addressed.'[102] Thus, the nature and intensity of Lanyer's feminism have become a subject of disagreement. Lynette McGrath for example stated that even though Lanyer did not have the specific term,

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[99] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 68.
[100] Suzanne Trill, 'Feminism versus Religion: Towards a Re-Reading of Aemilia Lanyer's 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum'', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 25(4) (2001), p. 68.
[101] Trill, 'Feminism versus Religion', *Renaissance and Reformation*, p. 69.
[102] Trill, 'Feminism versus Religion', *Renaissance and Reformation*, p. 69.

'feminism', to articulate her politics, she pushed the limits of protest within her cultural objection to achieve the most radical feminist expression possible,[103] while Tina Krontiris considers some parts of Lanyer's work conservative, 'requiring women "to comply with the rules that reproduced their subordination."'[104] Krontiris also gives an explanation to such inconsistencies and states that they are mainly a result of historical circumstances and are partly attributed to the author's personal discomfort, confusion and uncertainty regarding her demonstrations of female solidarity.[105]

Regarding Lanyer's dedications, sometimes her feminism in the patronage poems seems to hesitate in order to make room for the author's self-determination as a writer. Starting with the very first dedication 'To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie' to Queen Anne of Denmark, it is unexpected that 'given the characteristics that Lanyer delineates in her pantheon of biblical heroines […] the queen's authority seems to depend on her ability to bear children'[106]

> Renowed Empresse, and great Britaines Queene,
> Most gratious Mother of succeeding Kings;
> Vouchsafe to view that which is seldome seene,
> A Womans writing of divinest things:
> Reade it faire Queene, though it defective be,
> Your excellence can grace both It and Mee. (ll. 1-6)

This is the first stanza of the dedication in which Lanyer seems to simply praise the queen, but Kari Boyd McBride argues that the titles attributed to her are questionable because they would be reminiscent of the former queen, Elizabeth I.[107] McBride states that the praise towards Anne is displaced once more when Lanyer underlines the queen's

[103] Trill, 'Feminism versus Religion', *Renaissance and Reformation*, p. 69.
[104] Trill, 'Feminism versus Religion', *Renaissance and Reformation*, p. 70.
[105] Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices*, pp. 114-115.
[106] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 68.
[107] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 68.

fertility, again Anne is compared to Elizabeth I who did not carry children. Applauding women for their ability to bear children sounds particularly suspect, especially considering Lanyer's selection of non-mothering biblical heroines. 'This doubtful praise shows Lanyer to be a consummate *bricoleuse*, for she has made use here even of women's powerlessness',[108] using the same strategy she used to demonstrate that Eve was not responsible for the original sin, and here in the dedication to Queen Anne 'women's inability […] to inherit titles and property in a patrilinear system becomes a tool for Lanyer's building of her own authority relative to titled women.'[109] Then, when Lanyer says 'Vouchsafe to view that which is seldom seene, / A Womans writing of divinest things', she is asking the queen to read her verses, therefore to practice an act of virtue and authority typically designated for men. However, the queen here is merely the observer while Lanyer is authorized to write about 'divinest things.' Thus, 'a woman is given the virtuous power to read rightly, but, at the same time, the queen's authority is checked, as she is being asked merely to confirm Lanyer's right reading of the Bible.'[110]

In the first stanza of this dedication, the author is also establishing the grounds on which she is entitled to address Queen Anne. 'Jacobean customs stated that women were only allowed to write if they were translating texts written by men, or if they wrote about religion.'[111] Lanyer is aware of that, so she bases her claim to legitimacy on the premise that she is a woman and it is the queen's obligation to allow her to discuss a religious topic. By using these words, not only Lanyer is free from persecution because her work

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[108] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 68.
[109] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 68.
[110] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 69.
[111] Markiewicz, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum: A New Gospel for Women by Women', *Honors College Theses*, p. 15.

takes on a religious topic, but she also ensures to shield her radical message to women beneath the guise of religious literature.[112]

The following stanzas delineate the queen's virtues comparing her to several Greek goddesses. However these virtues are overshadowed by the initial displacement apparently in favor of Elizabeth I and by Lanyer's subversion of all royal authority:

> From Juno you have State and Dignities,
> From warlike Pallas, Wisdome, Fortitude;
> And from faire Venus all her Excellencies,
> With their best parts parts your Highnesse is indu'd:
> How much are we to honor those that springs
> From such rare beauty, in the blood of Kings?
>
> The Muses doe attend upon your Throne,
> With all the Artists at your becke and call;
> The Sylvane Gods, and Satyres every one,
> Before your faire triumphant Chariot fall:
> And shining Cynthia with her nymphs attend
> To honour you, whose Honour hath no end. (ll. 13-24)

Lanyer constructs an image of Anne elevated above all men and lauded by various creatures. This serves as another method for Lanyer to assert her authority in the field of writing, given that women were generally uneducated during her time. As a woman and consequently not formally educated, Lanyer's portrayal of the queen's inspiring personality enables her to say she can be a writer, even in the absence of instruction.[113]

Lanyer then proceeds:

> Behold, great Queene, faire Eves Apologie,
> Which I have writ in honour of your sexe,
> And doe referre unto your Majestie,
> To judge if it agree not with the Text:
> A if it doe, why are poore Women blam'd,
> Or by more faultie Men so much defam'd? (ll. 73-78)

In this stanza Lanyer tells the queen she has rewritten the story of the original sin and asks the queen to decide if her work is correct. 'Anne is given the authority to

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[112] Markiewicz, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum: A New Gospel for Women by Women', *Honors College Theses*, p. 15.
[113] Markiewicz, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum: A New Gospel for Women by Women', *Honors College Theses*, p. 17.

condemn women, or release them of all guilt that the Bible placed on them. Anne is also placed in a position where she cannot say that Lanyer's re-telling of the story is in the wrong.'[114] Again, the queen is apparently passively observing Lanyer's work. Thus, 'Lanyer's seemingly humble offer of her book to the queen must be placed in the context of this subversive portrait.'[115] Lanyer also writes:

> In the meane time, accept most gratious Queene
> This holy work, Virtue presents to you,
> In poore apparell, shaming to be seene,
> Or once t'appeare in your judiciall view:
> But that faire Virtue, though in meane attire,
> All Princes of the world doe most desire. (ll. 61-66)

Here Virtue itself is presenting the holy work. Lanyer identifies herself in Virtue and although it appears to the queen 'in poore apparel' Virtue is still what 'all Princes of the world doe most desire.' Earlier in the dedication Lanyer compares her work to a mirror in which 'some of your faire Virtues will appeare; / Though all it is impossible to find' (ll. 38-39) but the syntax is not clear enough to understand whether Lanyer's work cannot reflect the queen's virtues because they are too strong and virtuous or whether they are not virtuous enough to be reflected. According to McBride, when the author identifies herself with Virtue 'her seemingly deferential offer […] inscribes instead the queen's subjection to Lanyer.'[116] Therefore, Lanyer claims that she already possesses what Queen Anne might only uncover in Lanyer's work and by doing so, the author has also undermined the established norms of social position and power to shape her own authority.[117]

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[114] Markiewicz, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum: A New Gospel for Women by Women', *Honors College Theses*, p. 19.
[115] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 70.
[116] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 71.
[117] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 71.

Lanyer's self-fashioning as an author depends on analogous rhetorical techniques also in the dedications 'To the Ladie, Anne, Countesse of Dorcet,' 'To the Ladie Arabella,' 'To the Ladie Susan,' 'To the Ladie Lucie,' and 'To the Ladie Katherine Countesse of Suffolke.' In the dedication to the Countess of Dorset the 'praise of Anne is repeatedly deflected in such a way as substantially to negate that praise.'[118]

> Titles of honour which the world bestowed,
> To none but to the virtuous doth belong;
> As beauteous browser where true worth should repose,
> and where his dwellings should be built most strong:
> But when they are bestow's upon her foes,
> Poore virtues friends indure the greatest wrong:
> For they must suffer all indignity,
> Untill in heav'n they better graced be.
>
> What difference was there when the world began,
> Was it not Virtue that distinguisht all?
> All sprang but from one woman and one man,
> Then how doth Gentry come to rise and fall?
> Or who is he that every rightly can
> Distinguish of his birth, or tell at all,
> In what meane state his Ancestors have bin,
> Before some one of worth did honour win? (ll. 21-40)

In this poem Lanyer calls into question true nobility and inherited title and subverts the privilege of the title by invoking the religious order. Thus, Lanyer's exaltation of Anne Clifford transforms into a lesson on the emptiness and insignificance of earthly honors. The author also states that she and her poetry are genuinely worth of esteem as they live in an ideal world in which Christ is not crucified but is a king, a world of true reward. Lanyer proceeds in her poem repeatedly distinguishing nobility and inherited title by suggesting that even though the original ancestor truly deserved the title, the heirs may not be equally worthy. Moving from this subtle statement, the poet also seem to imply that the countess is lacking virtues because of her title. In the other

[118] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 71.

dedications this rhetoric of subversive celebration persists but with less hostility compared to poem to lady Anne.[119]

In the poem 'The Authors Dreame to the Ladie Marie, the Countesse Dowager of Pembrooke,' Lanyer's stinging discourse slightly changes. Here she is addressing Mary Sidney (1561-1621), an English writer that like Lanyer was among the first Englishwomen to gain notice for her poetry and literary patronage. She was the sister of Philip Sidney (1554-1586), one of the most prominent English writers of the Elizabethan age, which is indeed usually listed among other notable authors like Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare. Lanyer pictures Mary Sidney in a celestial pastoral landscape above all humans surrounded by roman goddesses like Minerva, goddess of wisdom, Flora, goddess of the flowering of crops, vineyards and fruit trees, Bellona, goddess who epitomizes war, and Dictina, Cretan protector of mountains and goddess of hunting and navigation. Also, her poetry is praised above Lanyer's. However, 'Sidney […] is, ironically trapped in the celestial landscape by virtue of her poetic fame.'[120] Mary Sidney is placed so high while Lanyer places herself way below her in a hierarchy of poets so that Sidney is consequently separated from the earthly context of patronage relationships.[121] These are the verses in which the praise is subverted:

> And Madame, if you will vouchsafe that grace,
> To grace those flowers that springs from virtues ground,
> Though your faire mind on worthier works is plac'd,
> On works that are more deepe, and more profound;
>
> Yet is it no disparagement to you,
> To see your Saviour in a Shepheards weed,
> Unworthily presented in your viewe,

[119] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, pp. 71-73.
[120] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 74.
[121] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 75.

Whose worthinesse will grace each line you reade. (ll. 213-220)

'Sidney is displaced by the greatness of her fame and by Lanyer's greater affinity to the subject of her poem, the abased and exalted Christ. The religious context both imprisons Sidney and authorizes Lanyer.'[122]

All things considered, McBride has scrutinized Lanyer's verses and proposed a reading that goes beyond the literal meaning of her words. The critic considers the use of the traditional patronage forms as subversive but also innovative and states that this cutting-edge way of making poetry allowed 'a middle-class woman to speak authoritatively to royal and noble women.'[123] By placing her connection with potential patrons within a hierarchy shaped by religious rather than courtly values, Lanyer has shifted the dynamics of the patron-client relationship, and by using biblical narratives, she ignited a groundbreaking political ideology that called for the ending of social and economic inequalities among women and men.[124]

On the other hand, some critics have focused more on the feminine power that Lanyer seems to depict. Elaine V. Beilin for example states that Lanyer's is a clear message of protest against society's misogynistic disparagement which motivates her arguments in favor of women's qualities.[125] According to the critic, no one before Lanyer has created a more proficiently poetry of praise based on women's virtues in order to establish their spiritual prominence. 'In the dedications, each woman's spirituality dominates her portrait, and she joins an ideal gallery devoted solely to Christian virtue.'[126]

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[122] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 75.
[123] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 78.
[124] Markiewicz, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum: A New Gospel for Women by Women', *Honors College Theses*, p. 1.
[125] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 180.
[126] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 184.

In the dedication to Queen Anne Lanyer writes 'Looke in this Mirrour of a worthy Mind, / Where some of your faire Virtues will appeare' (ll. 37-38). Here, while McBride declares that this image 'subverts the authority with which Lanyers seems to credit the queen,'[127] Beilin argues that the tropes of 'the triumph, the mirror, and the feast appear continually in her dedications, and reinforcing one another, they express the elevation of each woman's virtue'[128] because, according to the critic, Queen Anne is compared to Elizabeth I in a positive way rather than displacing Anne's virtues in favor of Elizabeth's like McBride argues instead.[129]

In conclusion a question arises: was Aemilia Lanyer truly praising her dedicatees or not? Was she then a feminist or not? There is no correct answer to this question, it depends whether readers and critics decide to focus on the literal words written by Lanyer or on the several possible meanings within the lines. The most correct answer is probably that 'Lanyer's feminism is thus positioned as individualist rather than relational'[130] because everything she wrote and everything she did in her life, she most likely did it for her self-determination and emancipation. Her self-determination and self-fashioning may also be considered feminism because Aemilia could have been an inspiration to other women during her time to become emancipated, and because she had the courage to raise her voice to change the female condition of inequality in English society.[131]

[127] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 70.
[128] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 186.
[129] Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, p. 186.
[130] Trill, 'Feminism versus Religion', *Renaissance and Reformation*, p. 70.
[131] Markiewicz, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum: A New Gospel for Women by Women', *Honors College Theses*, p. 23.

3.3 'To the Ladie Margaret, Countesse Dowager of Cumberland' versus 'To the Ladie Anne, Countesse of Dorcet'

Lastly, I would like to focus on Lanyer's dedication 'To the Ladie Margaret, Countesse Dowager of Cumberland' compared to 'To the Ladie Anne, Countesse of Dorcet.' The first dedication stands out from all the other dedications because it is a prose piece and is not particularly long like some others may appear. Given these premises, one might think that Margaret Clifford, the dedicatee, was not as important as the other dedicatees. On the contrary, Margared Clifford is given a unique prose dedication and is declared as Lanyer's only source of inspiration. Lanyer in the last stanza of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* before 'The Description of Cooke-ham' does in fact refer to the countess with these words:

> Whose excellence hath rais'd my sprites to write,
> Of what my thoughts could hardly apprehend;
> Your rarest Virtues did my soule delight,
> Great Ladie of my heart: I must commend
> You that appeare so faire in all mens sight:
> On your Deserts my Muses doe attend:
> You are the Articke Starre that guides my hand,
> All what I am, I rest at your command. (ll. 1833-1840)

These verses, the dedication, 'The Description of Cooke-ham', and 'the many addresses to and praises of Margaret Clifford throughout the volume identify her as the book's primary patron and audience.'[132]

The dedication to lady Margaret begins with Lanyer addressing to the countess, praising her respectability and excellence; and telling her that she does not possess any wealth:

> Right Honourable and Excellent Lady, I may say with Saint Peter, Silver nor gold have I none, but such as I have, that give I you: for having neither rich pearles of India, nor fine gold of Arabia, nor diamonds of inestimable value; neither those rich treasures, Arramaticall Gums, incense and sweet odours, which were presented by those Kingly

[132] Barbara K. Lewalski, 'Re-Writing Patriarchy and Patronage: Margaret Clifford, Anne Clifford and Aemilia Lanyer', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 21 (1991), p 100.

> Philosophers to the babe Jesus, I present unto you even our Lord Jesus himself, whose infinit value is not to be comprehended within the weake imagination or wit of man[133]

The humility topos soon gives room to Lanyer's presentation of her work to the countess. The poet writes 'I present unto you even our Lord Jeasus himself, whose infinit value is not to be comprehended within the weake imagination or wit of a man' thus, the lack of the author's wealth is instantly substituted by the fact that Lanyer is offering the story of the passion of Christ, a divine matter that, as such, is not comparable to earthly treasures like 'pearles of India,' 'fine gold of Arabia' or 'diamonds of inestimable value' because the value of the matter Lanyer is writing about is infinite.

Lanyer then proceeds writing that she wishes her book to be read by people long after her death and to remain in the world for a very long time as a beacon that shows the path to get to heaven:

> Therefore good Madame, to the most perfect eyes of your understanding, I deliver the inestimable treasure of all elected soules, to bee persued at convenient times; as also, the mirror of your most worthy minde, which may remaine in the world many years longer than your Honour, or my selfe can live, to be a light unto those that come after, desiring to tread in the narrow path of virtue, that leads the way to heaven.[134]

Even in the dedication to the most important dedicatee of her work Lanyer does not stop her rhetoric of self-fashioning by turning the situation she is describing in her favor.

If Margaret Clifford is celebrated throughout the volume of poems, the same cannot be said for her daughter. In the dedication to Anne Clifford 'To the Ladie Anne, Countesse of Dorcet,' the countess is taken as the example of the author's argument that true nobility and inherited title do not always correspond. The initial stanza recites:

> To you I dedicate this worke of Grace,
> This frame of glory which I have erected,
> For you faire mind I hold the fittest place,
> Where virtue should be settled and protected;

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[133] Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Iudæorum*, p. 361.

[134] Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Iudæorum*, p. 361.

If highest thoughts true honor do imbrace,
And holy Wisdom is of them respected:
Then in this Mirrour let your faire eyes looke,
To view your virtues in this blessed Booke. (ll. 1-8)

In these lines Anne's mind is essentially portrayed as the space where virtue 'should' exist, without a guarantee that it actually does. Therefore, the meaning of the verb appears ambiguous. The following stanzas emphasize the disparity between what is expected to exist in Clifford's 'faire mind' and the reality, as Lanyer consistently draws a distinction between inherited honor and heavenly honor. Implicitly aligning herself with genuinely honorable Christ, Lanyer suggests Clifford's lack of virtue is due to her title.[135] Lanyer connects Anne's endorsement of Lanyer's poetry to the countess's acquisition of the virtue she lacks. Anne's virtue is thus demonstrated through the support of Lanyer's book; and to emulate Jesus, Lanyer writes, is to act as Lanyer's patron. If the countess involves herself in acts of mercy, she will reveal that she genuinely descends from her mother:

So shal you shew from whence you are descended,
And leave to all posterities your fame,
So will your virtues always be commended,
And every one will reverence your name;
So this poore worke of mine shalbe defended
From any scandall that the world can frame:
And you a glorious Actor will appeare
Lovely to all, but unto God most deare. (ll. 81-88)

Lanyer then solves the problem of Anne Clifford's lack of virtue by saying that the solution is to support the poet. If the countess will offer patronage to Lanyer, then she will be virtuous.

But Lanyer also distinctly separates Anne Clifford from her mother because while Margaret 'is figured as truly virtuous, her daughter is repeatedly admonished to imitate

[135] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 72.

her mother, implying that [Anne] Clifford does not yet possess virtue, and suggesting the possibility that she may never be like her mother in that respect.'[136]

This dizzying reversal of position towards the countesse confirms once again Lanyer's ability to shape rhetoric by bending words in her favor and in support of her self-determination and self-fashioning as a writer, thereby confirming McBride's definition of the poet as a 'consummate *bricoleuse*.'[137]

[136] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 72.
[137] McBride, 'Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 68.

4 – Conclusion

The present dissertation focuses on Aemilia Lanyer, a renaissance woman poet who most likely was the first Englishwoman to publish her book of poems and the author of the first printed poem in the tradition of country house poems. Her claims, the topics she discussed and how such topics were discussed were particularly ahead of her time, probably the reason why unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, her name only came to the attention of scholars after Rowse's work on Shakespeare's Dark Lady. My dissertation began with a quick overview of women writer's status and social conditions in early modern England, proceeding with a brief biography of the poet, and a section on how Lanyer was rediscovered concluded the first chapter. The second chapter concentrated more on Lanyer's poems, investigating several aspects of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, from the style and themes to the reason why she wrote those poems. Finally, the third chapter explored Lanyer's dedicatory poems, possibly the most elaborate and intricate part of her work.

The common denominator of the chapters is feminism, an aspect that seems to infuse Lanyer's volume of poems but turns out to be not so obvious at it looks. Her subversive rhetoric, her singular ways to address the patrons and her questionable reasons in her attempt to defend Eve and accuse Adam of the original sin are the aspects that shake the foundations of her feminism the most. However, a careful analysis of her words that goes deeply under the surface of the obvious meaning of her words demonstrates Lanyer's remarkable skill in taking the traditional narrative of the woman as an inferior creature compared to the man, and in turning it in favor of a clever, subtle, and strong discourse against gender inequality and patriarchy. Lanyer's writings offered women a groundbreaking means through which they could challenge a society built for men.

Aemilia Lanyer wrote *Salve Deus* centuries ago, and yet her words are still very much significant today. She wrote her poems wishing to leave a legacy behind her and wishing her book would help generations of future women to obtain power and freedom through knowledge. I wrote this dissertation with the aim of highlighting the work of a female author whose poems and point of view are probably not talked about enough and deserve to be considered as equal to those of male poets.

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